

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY NASSAU
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
AMCONSUL BELIZE
AMCONSUL CURACAO
AMCONSUL HAMILTON
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 3105

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, GY
SUBJECT: CONFERENCE ON CARIBBEAN LABOR OPENS IN GEORGETOWN

BEGIN SUMMARY: A CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY THE CARIBBEAN
CONGRESS OF LABOR AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS FROM GUYANA,
CUBA AND GUADELOUPE OPENED HERE ON WEDNESDAY AMID SIGNS
THAT THE CONTINUING STRIKE IN GUYANA'S SUGAR INDUSTRY
WOULD INTRUDE ON AND POSSIBLY DISRUPT THE MEETING. THE
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MEETING, WHICH WAS ORGANIZED AT THE URGING OF CUBAN LABOR
LEADER ORESTES IBANEZ, IS EXPECTED TO FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL
ISSUES AND ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES FACING CARIBBEAN
WORKERS. END SUMMARY.

1. A FOUR DAY CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY THE GUYANA
TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC), THE CUBAN LABOR CONGRESS

(CTC), THE CARIBBEAN CONGRESS OF LABOR (CCL), AND THE CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS OF GUADELOUPE OPENED HERE ON WEDNESDAY, NOV 30. THE GATHERING INCLUDES SOME 50 REPRESENTATIVES FROM 36 LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND 19 CARIBBEAN NATIONS AND DEPENDENCIES. THE OPENING PUBLIC SESSION WAS HELD AT CRITCHLOW LABOR COLLEGE; ALL LATER SESSIONS WILL BE CLOSED. ACCORDING TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TUC, JOSEPH POLLYDORE, THE IDEA FOR THE MEETING GREW OUT OF DISCUSSIONS IN HAVANA DURING MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS IN 1976. CUBAN LABOR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN THE IMPETUS FOR THE CONFERENCE AND AN OFFICIAL OF THE CTC, MR. ORESTES IBANEZ, HAS TRAVELED TO GUYANA ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS TO PRESS FOR THE MEETINGS. DURING THE OPENING SESSION IBANEZ WAS VERY PROMINENT AND APPEARED TO BE IN CHARGE OF THE PROCEEDINGS. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON NOV 25 PRIOR TO CONFERENCE'S OPENING, IBANEZ SHARED SPOTLIGHT WITH TUC PRES BASIL BLAIR AND LATTER STATED THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF A GROUPING WITH WIDER SCOPE THAN THE ENGLISH SPEAKING CCL COULD NOT BE RULED OUT. HOWEVER, BLAIR CAUTIONED THAT EFFORTS TO EXPAND CONTACTS WITH LABOR GROUPS NOT TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE CCL DID NOT MEAN THAT OLD TIES WITH WESTERN UNIONS AND THE AFL-CIO AND THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF FREE LABOR DEVELOPMENT (AIFLD) WERE ABOUT TO BE ABANDONED. IN BLAIR'S WORDS, "WE FEEL WE CAN EMBRACE BOTH AREAS. IN CONFIDENTIAL

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FACT, WE FEEL WE CAN PERHAPS HELP TO BRING THESE TWO AREAS TOGETHER.")

2. PRESIDENT OF THE GUYANA LABOR UNION (GLU) STANTON CRITCHLOW (THE GLU'S PRESIDENT ON LEAVE IS PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM) TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE CONFERENCE WOULD PLACE A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. ACCORDING TO CRITCHLOW, THE CUBANS WERE PUSHING RESOLUTIONS ON THE INDEPENDENCE AND COMPLETE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF BELIZE AND INDEPENDENCE FOR PUERTO RICO. CRITCHLOW ALSO EXPECTED THAT THE PANAMA CANAL TREATIES WOULD BE A TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AND THAT THEY WOULD BE SUPPORTED. HE ALSO CONFIRMED REPORTS THAT THE CUBANS HAD BEEN THE MOTIVE FORCE BEHIND THE GATHERING. COMMENT: RUMORS HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING THAT THE CUBANS ARE PAYING MOST OR ALL OF THE COST OF THE CONFERENCE. THE FACT THAT BOTH THE TUC AND THE CCL OPERATE ON RATHER TIGHT BUDGETS GIVES CREDENCE TO THESE STROIES. END COMMENT.

3. THE OPENING SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE SAW LARGE NUMBERS OF PICKETS FROM BOTH GUYANA'S RULING PEOPLE'S

NATIONAL CONGRESS (PNC) AND THE OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) MILLING AROUND OUTSIDE THE CRITCHLOW CAMPUS. THE DEMONSTRATORS' SIGNS COMMENTED ON THE THREE MONTH OLD STRIKE IN GUYANA'S SUGAR INDUSTRY. REPORTEDLY, THE LABOR CONFERENCE WAS SCHEDULED MONTHS AGO AND ITS ACCIDENTAL COINCIDENCE WITH THE THREE-MONTHLONG SUGAR WORKERS' STRIKE MUST OBVIOUSLY BE WORRISOME TO THE GOVERNMENT, SINCE ITS TIMING DOES PROVIDE THE OPPOSITION PPP (WHICH CONTROLS THE SUGAR WORKERS) WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE STRIKE AND THUS EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT.

4. IN AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO ANTICIPATE CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE SUGAR STRIKE, DEPRIMIN
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PTOLEMY REID (WHO SUBSTITUTED FOR PRIMIN BURNHAM) WELCOMED THE DELEGATES WITH AN ADDRESS WHICH BEGAN BY NOTING THE COMMON HISTORY OF COLONIALISM AND SLAVERY THAT CHARACTERIZED THE CARIBBEAN. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT TRADE UNIONS HAD BEEN FORCED TO RESORT TO STRIKES AND A GNERAL ATTITUDE OF CONFRONTATION. IN THE SOCIALIST MILIEU THESE TACTICS HAD BECOME OUTMODED AND NOW ACTED TO RETARD THE PROGRESS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. AMONG THE ARCHAIC REMNANTS OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT REID NOTED THE SUBSTITUTION OF UNDUE ENTHUSIASM FOR EXPERTISE, THE CONTINUED USE OF TERMS SUCH AS "SCABS" AND BLACKLEGS" WHEN THEIR MEANINGS HAD BEEN ALTERED BY SOCIALISM, THE ATTACKS ON AN ENTIRE ECONOMY BY A SINGLE UNION, AND THE USE OF TRADE UNIONISM AS A SMOKESCREEN FOR OVERT CRIMINAL ACTS. IN A RATHER OMINOUS CONCLUSION REID REMARKED THAT THE ADVANCED SOCIALIST COUNTRIES MIGHT PROVIDE A GOOD EXAMPLE IN THIS REGARD. COMMENT: THE TONE OF REID'S SPEECH INDICATES THAT THE GOG IS GOING TO BE MORE VIGILANT DURING THIS CONFERENCE THAN IT WAS FOR THE CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES RECENTLY HELD IN GEORGETOWN (GEORGETOWN 3086). THE GEORGETOWN "GRAPE-VINE" REPORTS THAT THE SUGAR STRIKE WILL BE BROUGHT UP AND THAT THE SESSIONS COULD BECOME QUITE ACRIMONIOUS AS GOG SUPPORTERS ANRSOPPONENTS SQUARE OFF. VARIOUS RUMORS HAVE ALSO HAD TRINIDADIAN LABOR LEADERS BASDEO PANDAY, RAFFIQUE SHAH, AND GEORGE WEEKS ARRIVING IN TOWN FOR THE MEETING. IF THIS WERE TO HAPPEN, CONCEIVABLY THE CONFERENCE COULD GENERATE TENSIONS THAT WOULD PUT A FORMIDABLE STRAIN ON THE GUYANESE LABOR MOVEMENT AND RISK SPLITTING IT INTO HOSTILE PRO AND ANTI GOG CAMPS.
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